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Scriptores post Theophanem

Citation for published version:

Stouraitis, Y 2021, Scriptores post Theophanem: Normative aspects of imperial historiography in tenth-century Byzantium. in W Pohl & D Mahoney (eds), *Historiography and Identity IV: The Writing of History Across Medieval Eurasia*. Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, vol. 30, Brepols, pp. 219-246. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.CELAMA-EB.5.121059>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1484/M.CELAMA-EB.5.121059](https://doi.org/10.1484/M.CELAMA-EB.5.121059)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Historiography and Identity IV

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SCRIPTORES POST THEOPHANEM: NORMATIVE ASPECTS OF IMPERIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY IN TENTH-CENTURY BYZANTIUM

Yannis Stouraitis

A comparative approach to the social role of history in the construction and communication of collective identity in Latin Europe, Byzantium, and Islam towards the end of the first millennium seems to be facilitated by the common cognitive character of historiography in these three cultural spheres. It is generally accepted that the so-called Western historiographical tradition was marked by the role of the person. An author wrote his or her work of history for other persons with the aim to provide them with knowledge of the past, the image of which remained constantly open to scrutiny and reformulation.¹ In contrast, in the East Asian historiographical tradition history writing was principally considered as an official, state-run task. The ruling power employed public servants to anonymously write history based on facts provided by state documents. The latter were to be destroyed after the conclusion of the work in order to prevent any revision of what was intended to become the final, official version of the past published under the seal of state authority. The emperor was not allowed to see the text before it had taken its original final form.²

¹ Liakos, 'Γνωστική ή δεοντολογική ιστοριογραφία', pp. 209–10.

² Sato, 'Cognitive Historiography', pp. 130–33.

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Historiography and Identity IV: Writing History Across Medieval Eurasia, ed. by Walter Pohl and Daniel Mahoney, CELAMA 30 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), pp. 219–246

BREPOLS  PUBLISHERS

10.1484/M.CELAMA-EB.5.121059

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According to the Japanese historian Masayuki Sato, who introduced the analytical distinction between Western *cognitive* and Eastern *normative* historiography, the different social role of historiographical works in the premodern East Asian world was due to the fact that history acquired there the social function that sacred texts, such as the Bible and the Qur'ān, or legal texts, such as the *Codex Iustinianus*, had in the Western Euro-Asian world.³ Therefore, the task of history writing was primarily associated with the need to make up for the lack of such texts that would provide society with a deontological framework. By destroying the historical documents from which the official version of history had stemmed, the latter acquired the status of a historical fact and thus of a sacred text, for it constructed an image of the past that could not be altered. As a result, this past could be referred to as an unquestionable normative framework for human judgement.⁴

Sato's binary analytical schema has been addressed sceptically. In Jörn Rüsen's view, such a clear-cut distinction between the two historiographical traditions does not really apply, since morality had been a central aspect of the social function of Western historiography before the great scientific turn of the nineteenth century and remained so thereafter.⁵ As a result, cognition and normativity need to be approached as diachronically intertwined in Western historiographical thought. In Rüsen's own words:

'Historical' means that what happened in the past has a meaning for the present. The past is related to the present by a temporal chain of events and developments, and the conception of change is always influenced by assumptions of its meaning and significance. These assumptions have a normative impact, since they are generated by the cultural needs of people in the present, which can only be fulfilled by interpreting the experience of the past.⁶

This argument raises a central methodological issue regarding the scrutiny of the differentiated social role of historiography in medieval cultures. According to Sato, the normative character of traditional East Asian historiography was conditioned by the fact that history was not merely intended to discover and interpret the past, but also to construct a fixed image of it which precluded

³ Sato, 'Cognitive Historiography', p. 131. This is not to say that private persons did not undertake the task of writing historiographical works, but these were regarded as works of literature by their contemporaries, Sato, 'Cognitive Historiography', pp. 136–37; cf. Liakos, 'Γνωστική ή δεοντολογική ιστοριογραφία', p. 210.

⁴ Sato, 'Cognitive Historiography', p. 135.

⁵ Rüsen, 'Morality and Cognition', p. 41.

⁶ Rüsen, 'Morality and Cognition', p. 41.

any future revision.⁷ Rüsen's thesis indicates, instead, that the main difference between East Asian and Western historiography lies not in the absence of a normative function by the latter, but in the different, renegotiable character of its normative dimension.

Historiography in the medieval Euro-Mediterranean world may not have acquired a 'sacred' status by constructing an image of the past that could not be subject to revision. Nonetheless, this does not mean that it was only intended to discover and interpret the past. It also aimed to reconstruct it according to current needs, to which history was to serve as a normative point of reference. Moreover, it does not mean that certain historiographical texts were not intended to claim a higher authoritative status, as opposed to others, in an effort to instrumentalize a certain image of the past as a normative framework for the present and the future.

In what follows, I shall argue that the corpus of history known under the conventional titles *Scriptores post Theophanem* or *Theophanes continuatus*⁸ represents such a case. It was a historiographical project that aimed to recall a certain image of historical continuity into the present and thus to construct historical consciousness that would serve the imperial power's need to reassert a traditional vision of community and identity.

The Project of the Scriptores post Theophanem

The corpus of the *Scriptores* has come down to us in a single manuscript of the early eleventh century, the BAV, MS Vat. Gr. 167.⁹ It consists of six books, the authors of which remained anonymous. In the present, scholars regard this historiographical synthesis as internally divided into three parts. One part includes books one to four that treat the time between 813 and 867, each one of them dealing with the reign of one of the four emperors that ruled successively during this period (Leo V, Michael II, Theophilos, and Michael III). A separate part forms the fifth book, the so-called *Vita Basilii* (*VB*), which treats the reign of Emperor Basil I (867–86), Constantine VII's grandfather and founder of the so-called Macedonian dynasty. The final part is the sixth book dealing with the reigns of all the emperors that ruled between 886 and 963 (Leo VI, Alexander,

⁷ Sato, 'Cognitive Historiography', p. 135.

⁸ The original version of the title is *Οἱ μετὰ Θεοφάνην* meaning 'Those after Theophanes'.

⁹ Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, I, 340; Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι*, p. 345.

regents of Constantine VII, Romanos I, Constantine VII, and Romanos II). In the manuscript, the account abruptly stops in the year 961, two years before the end of the reign of Romanos II (959–63).¹⁰

There exists an ongoing debate as to who the potential authors of the various books might have been. Moreover, it remains an open issue whether these six books should be viewed as a uniform work of history. The first five books were certainly written under the supervision of Constantine VII between 945 and 959, the period of his sole rule. According to the proem of the first book, the emperor offered the material and guidance to the actual authors, whereas the rubric of the fifth book (*Vita Basilii*) implies an active role of the emperor in the writing of the text.¹¹ The sixth book was written some years after the emperor's death, but its author remained faithful to the line of anonymity. All six books were put together by the redactor of the eleventh-century manuscript as a unified historical corpus; however, the fact that the *VB* has its own proem, in which the text is titled 'Historical Narrative' (*historikē diégēsis*), as opposed to the title *chronographia* in the proem of the first book, is considered as evidence that this was initially a separate work which was put together with the first four books at a later stage.¹²

Certainly, the existence of a second proem is a strong indication that the *VB* was initially conceived as an independent historical work, the composition of which most probably preceded the first four books of the *Scriptores*.¹³ Be that as it may, it has been noted that the author(s) of the latter were well aware of the content of the *VB* when writing the text, and that they organized the narrative according to what was (or was going to be) narrated therein about Basil I. This is a strong indication that, if the composition of the first four books postdated the fifth, the former came into being with the intention to be presented jointly with the latter in the form of a historical corpus of common logic and historical perspective.¹⁴

¹⁰ Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, 1, 343.

¹¹ *Vita Basilii*, ed. by Ševčenko, p. 8; Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, p. 166.

¹² Bury, 'The Treatise *De administrando imperio*', pp. 571–72; Ševčenko, 'The Title of and Preface to *Theophanes continuatus*', pp. 88–89; Mango, 'Introduction', p. 4*.

¹³ On this argument, see Codoñer, 'Constantino Porfirogéneto', p. 319; cf. Mango, 'Introduction', p. 9*. Bury, 'The Treatise *De administrando imperio*', p. 551, has pleaded for a simultaneous composition of the first five books.

¹⁴ Hirsch, *Byzantinische Studien*, pp. 225–26; Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι*, pp. 323, 353–55. On a different approach, see Ševčenko, 'The Title and Preface to *Theophanes continuatus*', pp. 88–89.

The sixth book represents a different case, for it was written after the emperor's death and therefore not under his supervision. It treats the reigns of five emperors together as opposed to the previous five books that each treated a single emperor's reign.¹⁵ Recently, it has been shown that the older thesis that regarded the sixth book as the product of two different authors, one of whom did not belong to the pro-Macedonian intellectual faction, is flawed.¹⁶ A close reading of the text does not verify the existence of two diametrically opposite attitudes towards the Macedonian dynasty. It follows that we are dealing with the work of one author, who wrote a few years after Constantine VII's death, probably in the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas (963–69), with the intention to continue and complete the emperor's historiographical project.

That Constantine VII had anticipated the need for the composition of a historical account dealing with the period from the death of Basil I into his own reign is made evident in the proem of the *VB*.¹⁷ The anonymous author of the sixth book picked up the narration where the fifth book had ended without interpolating a proem. This demonstrates his intention to present this book as the organic continuation of the previous five and implies that he was a member of or, at least, close to the deceased emperor's intellectual circle. One may then plausibly argue that the author was, in fact, aiming to conclude the project that had been envisaged by Constantine VII.

It has been pointed out that Constantine VII was the only Byzantine emperor who explicitly commissioned the writing of historiographical works on behalf of the imperial power (Genesius's history, *Scriptores post Theophanem*) and that the mid-tenth century was marked by a court conception of how history should be written.¹⁸ With respect to that, it is important to notice that, as opposed to the other historiographical works of this or the previous period that were published under the name of a certain author,¹⁹ something which personalized the projected view on the past, the corpus of the *Scriptores* was

¹⁵ The individual chapters are, however, divided according to emperors' reigns and entitled *Basileia* and once *Autokratōria*, see Mango, 'Introduction', p. 3*.

¹⁶ Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι*, pp. 360–62. On the older thesis that was generally accepted until recently, see Hirsch, *Byzantinische Studien*, pp. 273–75, 285–86.

¹⁷ *Vita Basilii*, ed. by Ševčenko, 1, p. 8, ll. 3–10.

¹⁸ Magdalino, 'Knowledge', p. 202; Markopoulos, 'Byzantine History Writing', pp. 189–90.

¹⁹ Even though a debate exists as to whether the other historical work commissioned by Constantine VII was indeed written by an author named Genesius or not, there is little doubt that this was a work circulated under an author's name and not anonymously; Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι*, p. 315.

circulated as a work of anonymous authors. In light of this, it is my contention that, in order to scrutinize the intended social role of this work of history, one should remove the spotlight from the debate regarding who the actual authors of each one of the books might have been. Of particular importance in this case is rather the novelty that these books were purposefully presented as a historical corpus of anonymous authors written by the order and under the supervision of the highest authority in the empire, the imperial office (i.e. the *state*).

From the point of view of the aforementioned analytical distinction between *normative* and *cognitive* historiography, the *Scriptores* seem to be positioned somewhere in the middle. By the standards of the medieval Euro-Mediterranean and, in particular, Byzantine historiographical tradition, they obviously represented a step towards impersonal history. Even though in the Byzantine socio-political context the corpus could not acquire the function of a 'sacred' history, the facts of which would not be subject to reinterpretation and reconstruction in the future,²⁰ it still demonstrates some of the traits, by which a historiographical work claimed a normative status in the East Asian sociopolitical context. The emperor did not sign the work as the author,²¹ but had himself presented in the proem as the authority that had commissioned the task to anonymous authors, obviously well-educated officials of the court. He was also presented as the authority that provided the authors with the material (i.e. historical documents). Moreover, the author of the sixth book, who wrote after the emperor's death, maintained his anonymity — a strong indication that he purposefully remained faithful to a certain conception regarding the public image of the corpus.

By portraying this work as an impersonal product of the highest authority in the empire, the imperial office, an implicit but distinct claim to objectivity and authority of knowledge was made. The goal of reserving a normative status for this historical corpus is stated in the proem of the first book. There the anonymous author claims that the emperor's intention was to provide a history that would function as a public teaching-ground.²² In view of the aforementioned

²⁰ For instance, John Skylitzes wrote a history in the late eleventh century that treated the period from 813 to 1057 and stated in his proem that his goal was to revise older historical narrations of the ninth and tenth centuries that had not been objective, see Skylitzes, *Historia*, ed. by Thurn, pp. 3–4.

²¹ About Constantine VII's actual participation in the authorship of the work, see Ševčenko, 'The Title of and Preface to *Theophanes continuatus*', p. 86; Karpouzilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι*, pp. 352–53; Condoner, 'Algunas consideraciones sobre la autoría del *Theophanes continuatus*', pp. 17–28.

²² ὥσπερ τι κοινὸν διδασκαλεῖον προθεῖναι πᾶσιν ἐβουλεύσω καλῶς, *Theophanes continuatus* (*libri I–IV*), ed. by Featherstone and Codoñer, proem, p. 12, ll. 23–24; cf. Ševčenko, 'The Title

strategy of representation of the *Scriptores*, the latter statement should not be discredited as a conventional reproduction of an authorial *topos*. It should rather be evaluated in conjunction with the emperor's intention to produce history for the future. Therefore, it should be understood as the main motive that set in motion the *Scriptores* project. Not least, because another contemporary historiographical work, the history of Genesius (*Liber regnum*), had treated the same period by the order of the same emperor.²³

Genesius's text, which preceded the first four books of the *Scriptores*,²⁴ treated the reigns of the five emperors that held power between 813 and 886 (beginning with the accession of Leo V and ending with the death of Basil I). This work was also intended to communicate the propaganda of the Macedonian dynasty about the rise of its founder, Basil I, to the throne. Constantine VII's decision to produce a new version of the history of the same period leaves little doubt that the work of Genesius did not fulfil the emperor's expectations.²⁵ However, if Constantine VII was dissatisfied with the way this author had constructed his grandfather's propagandistic portrait, his motives in marginalizing Genesius's history seem to have gone beyond the simple need to refurbish Basil I's image.

In the introduction of the new edition of the *VB*, Cyril Mango posed the question as to whether the history of Genesius would have treated the reign of Basil I, had the fifth book of the *Scriptores*, the *VB*, already been written at that time.²⁶ This plausible question stresses the very fact that, had Constantine VII written a detailed historical account of his grandfather's reign by the time he commissioned Genesius to write a history of the period after 813, there would have been no reason for the latter to include Basil I's reign in his work.

of and Preface to *Theophanes continuatus*, p. 85: 'Thou hast decided been best advised to proffer all this as a public teaching-ground of sorts'.

²³ ἄτε ταῦτά γε καὶ διατεῖναι προσεταγμένος πρὸς Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος, Genesius, *Iosephi Genesii regum libri quattuor*, ed. by Lesmüller-Werner and Thurn, proem, p. 3, ll. 14–15; Engl. translation, Genesius, *On the Reigns*, trans. by Kaldellis, preface, p. 3: 'since I have been commanded to make this inquiry by the Emperor Constantine'.

²⁴ Barišić, 'Génésios et le Continuateur de Théophane', p. 120; Ljubarski, 'Theophanes continuatus and Genesios', pp. 12–27; Mango, 'Introduction', p. 7*.

²⁵ On Genesius's failure to live up to the task of dynastic propaganda, see Barišić, 'Génésios et le Continuateur de Théophane', pp. 121–22; Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World*, pp. 582–83.

²⁶ Mango, 'Introduction', p. 7*. Nonetheless, Mango states on the following page (p. 8*) that he is inclined to accept W. Treadgold's chronological scheme, according to which the *VB* preceded Genesius's history.

Moreover, Genesius states in his proem that he was the first to write the history of the emperors treated in his text.²⁷ Such a statement seems at least awkward, if he knew that his patron, Constantine VII, to whom he dedicated his work, had already concluded a detailed history of Basil I's reign.

All this indicates not only that Genesius's history must have preceded the *VB*, but also that the latter work, given that it preceded the first four books of the *Scriptores*, was initially conceived as an independent historical account, the main purpose of which was to make up for Genesius's failure to stand up to the task of presenting the reign of the founder of the Macedonian dynasty in the best possible light. Constantine VII's decision to create the corpus of the *Scriptores* by supplementing the *VB* with another four books, which were written afterwards with the intention to fully substitute Genesius's history and together to provide an official-imperial version of the history of the period 813–86, is usually attributed to his intention to discredit those emperors that preceded his grandfather on the throne in order to highlight the Macedonian dynasty's role in reinvigorating the empire. However, a closer look at Constantine VII's strategy in shaping the public image of the *Scriptores* suggests that the conception of this historical corpus, which had the potential of being extended into the emperor's own times, had an additional, more ambitious goal than that.

According to the title of the first book this was a

chronicle written by the order of Constantine, our Christ-loving Sovereign born in the purple, son of our most wise Sovereign and renowned emperor, Leo. It begins where the (work of the) late Theophanes of Sigriane, a relative of the emperor, came to an end.²⁸

The purposeful designation of the work as a *chronographia*, even though this was a dynastic history, to which the history (*historikê diêgêsis*) of Basil I's deeds (*VB*) was attached, was due to the intention to establish its image as the quasi-organic continuation of the chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor.²⁹ Apart from the reference to the work of Theophanes in the title, the anonymous author of the

²⁷ Genesius, *Iosephi Genesii regum libri quattuor*, ed. by Lesmüller-Werner and Thurn, proem, p. 3, ll. 17–20.

²⁸ Χρονογραφία συγγραφέϊσα ἐκ προστάγματος Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ φιλοχρίστου και πορφυρογεννήτου δεσπότη, υἱοῦ Λέοντος τοῦ σοφωτάτου δεσπότη και αὐτοκράτορος• ἀρχομένη ἔνθεν κατέληξεν ὁ κατὰ γένος προσήκων τῷ βασιλεῖ μακαρίτης Θεοφάνης ο τῆς Σιγριανῆς, *Theophanes continuatus (libri I–IV)*, ed. by Featherstone and Codoñer, p. 8; cf. Ševčenko, 'The Title of and Preface to *Theophanes continuatus*', p. 81.

²⁹ Cf. Barišić, 'Génésios et le Continueur de Théophane', p. 132 n. 3; Magdalino, 'Knowledge', p. 202.

first book repeated this claim in the proem, where he highlighted the emperor's decision to consider the concluding point of Theophanes' chronicle as the best possible starting point of this historical corpus.³⁰ Moreover, he spotlighted the alleged bonds of kinship that related Theophanes with Constantine VII, and stated that this relationship brought glory upon the chronicler and fame upon the emperor.³¹ By highlighting Theophanes' relationship with the Macedonian dynasty in the proem of the *Scriptores*, Constantine VII was seeking to appropriate the saint-chronicler's authoritative image in regard to religious orthodoxy as well as to attribute to Theophanes' work the image of a historiographical text that enjoyed the approval of the higher authority in the empire, the imperial office.³²

However, Theophanes' chronicle, which treated the period from the reign of Diocletian to 813, constituted the organic continuation or, better said, the completion of the unfinished world chronicle of George the *synkellos* that had been written in the last years of the eighth century. In the proem of his text, Theophanes praises George as a distinguished chronographer and states that he had undertaken the difficult task to carry on and complete the latter's excellent work after his death.³³ This means that for the author as well as for his contemporaries, his text was not considered as an independent work of history that was intended to focus on the history of the Christian Roman imperial rule in Constantinople, thus marginalizing the pagan Roman imperial past. It was the second part of a bipartite work of world history. The interconnection of the two texts in Byzantine perception is confirmed by the fact that they appeared together in the manuscript tradition from the second half of the ninth century onwards.³⁴

³⁰ ἐκείνην ταύτης ἀρχὴν εἶναι νομίσας τῆς ἱστορίας ἀρίστην, τὴν τῷ μακαρίτῃ Θεοφάνει γενομένην κατάληξιν, *Theophanes continuatus (libri I–IV)*, ed. by Featherstone and Codoñer, I.proem, p. 12; cf. Ševčenko, 'The Title of and Preface to *Theophanes continuatus*', pp. 81–82: 'Thou hast decided that the conclusion of the work by the late Theophanes would be the most appropriate beginning for the (present) narrative.'

³¹ ὃν κατὰ συγγένειαν καὶ ἀγχιστεῖαν, τὸ εἶναι νιωνὸς λαχὼν, ἀποσεμνύνεις τε ἐκ τῶν σῶν ἱκανῶς καὶ ἀντίλαμβάνεις αὐτὸς παρ' αὐτοῦ τινὰ εὐκλειαν, *Theophanes continuatus (libri I–IV)*, ed. by Featherstone and Codoñer, I.proem, p. 12; cf. Ševčenko, 'The Title of and Preface to *Theophanes continuatus*', p. 85: 'He is Thy close relative by virtue of Thy being his grandson; and Thou providest him with a great deal of glory on account of Thine own (writings), while in turn Thou receives some fame from him.'

³² See Magdalino, 'Knowledge', p. 202.

³³ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. by De Boor, I, 3–4; *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor*, trans. by Mango and Scott, p. 1.

³⁴ Adler and Tuffin, *The Chronography of George Synkellos*, p. lxxvii.

It follows that by appropriating Theophanes in the proem of the *Scriptores*, Constantine VII also appropriated by association the chronicle of George the *synkellos*, thus binding it to the imperial office and equally attributing to it an authoritative image. As Cyril Mango has pointed out, the texts of George the *synkellos* and Theophanes the Confessor formed together the most systematic Roman account of the human past in the form of a world chronicle at the time.³⁵ Considering this, the representation of the *Scriptores* as the organic continuation of these two texts allows for little doubt that the emperor's aim was to entrench the normative character of his impersonal product of dynastic history by integrating it into a corpus of world history from the Creation to his own times.

In this way, Constantine VII was also fulfilling in an indirect fashion the plan that was mentioned in the proem of the fifth book (*VB*). There, the author stated that he had not set himself to the task of writing the most noteworthy deeds accomplished throughout the whole duration of the Roman power in the city of *Byzantium* (i.e. Constantinople) because such a task required a great deal of time and effort, as well as an abundant supply of books and respite from public duties.³⁶ This statement, to the interpretation of which I shall come back later, has been considered as an unconvincing excuse given the abundance of historical material in the intellectual circle of Constantine VII.³⁷ Regardless, this is another strong indication that the *VB* was initially conceived as an independent work written before the first four books of the *Scriptores*. Otherwise, if the emperor had already set in motion the project of writing the first four books as a continuation of the bipartite world chronicle of George the *synkellos* and Theophanes the Confessor, thus acknowledging and circumscribing the authoritative character of the latter texts for the history of the Romans before 813, then why should he have included a statement in a book written later (or, for that matter, simultaneously), which would point to the need for a rewriting of the whole history of the Roman imperial rule seated in Constantinople? Moreover, we know that the text of Theophanes the Confessor underwent a revision by the circle of Constantine VII.³⁸ This revision was obviously related to the emperor's plan to appropriate this text and connect it to his historical corpus.

³⁵ Mango and Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor*, p. iii.

³⁶ *Vita Basilii*, ed. by Ševčenko, proem, p. 9.

³⁷ This is an argument put forward by Ljubarski, *Prodolžatel' Feofana*, p. 244; cf. Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονολόγοι*, p. 357.

³⁸ Yannopoulos, 'Les vicissitudes historiques', pp. 537–38.

There exists general consensus that the composition of the *VB* post-dates the year 948, with 950 being suggested as a probable date.³⁹ About Genesis's history there is an ongoing debate regarding its precedence over the *VB* or not.⁴⁰ The view adopted here is that, if this commissioned work was written at one stage — as is more probable — it must have preceded the *VB* and therefore it should be dated before 948.⁴¹ The first four books of the *Scriptores*, given that they were written after the *VB*, should inevitably be dated sometime between 950 and 959 (Constantine VII's death).

A suggested reconstruction of the events according to this chronology goes as follows: Constantine VII received the commissioned history of Genesis sometime before 948 and, being dissatisfied with the cursory treatment of Basil I's reign, decided to write a separate history of his grandfather's reign that would make up for this failure. At this time, he did not yet have in mind to fully substitute Genesis's work, but only to provide a better account of Basil I's reign and refurbish his image. It was only after the *VB* had been concluded, that is, in 950 at the earliest that he set in motion the project that would incorporate his grandfather's history, and potentially also the history of the latter's successors until his own times, into a world chronicle, thus constructing the largest

³⁹ Bury, 'The Treatise *De administrando imperio*', pp. 551, 574.

⁴⁰ Bury, 'The Treatise *De administrando imperio*', pp. 550, 574; Genesis, *On the Reigns of the Emperors*, trans. by Kaldellis, pp. x–xiv; Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, pp. 180–82.

⁴¹ Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, pp. 165–88, suggests a chronological sequence, according to which the *VB* preceded Genesis's history. This sequence does not explain, however, Genesis's choice to treat Basil I's reign in his text and to state in the proem that he was the first to do so, while he knew that a detailed account on this emperor's reign was already concluded under the supervision of his own patron Constantine VII. An alternative solution to Bury's view about the chronological sequence regarding the composition of the two texts has been suggested by A. Kaldellis. He argued that the first three books of Genesis's history were written at an earlier stage and the fourth book, consisting of the cursory account of Basil I's deeds, was written after the *VB* had been concluded; Genesis, *On the Reigns of the Emperors*, trans. by Kaldellis, pp. xi–xiv. Nonetheless, if we accept that Genesis concluded the whole account at one stage before the *VB*, as his proem indicates, his choice to treat Michael III and Basil I together in a single book can still be explained. Considering that Basil was already co-emperor when he organized Michael III's murder to remain sole autocrat, Genesis may have opted for a perspective of continuity, instead of change/succession, in the imperial office, when he decided to treat both emperors in a single book. In his view, such an approach may have seemed as a corroboration of Basil I's image of legitimacy. Instead, for his patron, Constantine VII, this may have been an additional reason to set in motion the composition of the *VB*.

and most authoritative Byzantine corpus of universal history from the creation to the days of his own dynasty.

Genesisius's work could obviously not fulfil the latter task. This was conceived and circulated as a person's individual product, for which he had personally made the choice of his material,⁴² and which treated a short historical period of certain emperors' reigns under the rubric 'book of history' (*historias biblos*).⁴³ The conception of a personal history, in which the trajectories of morality and cognition were intertwined, is made evident in the proem where Genesisius stated that he had written a history with the aim to confer benefit to future generations and to profit himself with the knowledge of the past.⁴⁴ Instead, the anonymous corpus of the *Scriptores* was purposefully designed by Constantine VII to be advertised and, thus, broadly received as a *chronographia* that constituted the continuation and culmination of an authoritative world chronicle.

History Writing and the East Roman renovatio imperii

In light of the above, the issue of the conception of the historiographical project of the *Scriptores* pertains to the development of the genre of historiography and its socio-ideological role in tenth-century Byzantium. This issue needs to be addressed in conjunction with the goal of imperially sponsored historiography to contribute to the reformulation of Roman political ideology, i.e. Roman identity. As far as this is concerned, one needs to begin by looking at the prem-

⁴² ὅθεν καὶ γὰρ νῦν τὴν περὶ τούτων γραφικὴν σπουδὴν πολυτρόπως ἀνηρημένος, ἔκ τε τῶν τότε βεβιωκότων καὶ ἀμωσγέπως εἰδότων ἔκ τε φήμης δῆθεν δραμούσης ἡκουτισμένος, εἰς τόνδε τὸν ἀγῶνα παρώρμημαι, Genesisius, *Iosephi Genesii regum libri quattuor*, ed. by Lesmüller-Werner and Thurn, proem, p. 3; Engl. trans. by Kaldellis, preface, p. 4: 'Hence I have now undertaken the complex task of writing about them, by listening both to men who lived then and who have some limited knowledge of what transpired and to oral traditions that have come down from that time'.

⁴³ Genesisius, *Iosephi Genesii regum libri quattuor*, ed. by Lesmüller-Werner and Thurn, proem, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Ἡ τῶν πάλαι πεπονημένων διάληψις μεγίστην ὄντως ὠφέλειαν παριστῶσα τοὺς ἐπιλημμένους αὐτῆς πρὸς γραφὴν αὐτῶν διανίστησιν. ὅθεν καὶ γὰρ νῦν τὴν περὶ τούτων γραφικὴν σπουδὴν πολυτρόπως ἀνηρημένος [...] εἰς τόνδε τὸν ἀγῶνα παρώρμημαι, τὸ μὲν εἰ πως πρὸς τι λυσιτελὲς τοῖς μετέπειτα διοφθεῖν, τὸ δὲ καὶ ἑμαυτῷ τούτο καρπώσοιμι, Genesisius, *Iosephi Genesii regum libri quattuor*, ed. by Lesmüller-Werner and Thurn, proem, p. 3; Engl. trans. Genesisius, *On the Reigns*, ed. by Kaldellis, preface, p. 4: 'The knowledge of past events confers great benefit by itself and can also inspire those who receive that benefit to record those events. Hence I have now undertaken the complex task of writing about them [...] I embark upon this venture so that I may seem to be conferring some benefit upon those who come after me, but also so that I may enjoy the fruits of it for myself'.

ise that the Macedonian dynasty, in particular Constantine VII, undertook the task to revise the content of Roman political ideology (and thus, also, identity). According to this premise, the Macedonian emperors abandoned the traditional Roman ecumenical claim of world supremacy that entailed the Roman emperor's sovereign rights over the former *orbis romanus* in favour of a new vision of *limited* ecumenicity that precluded the Latin West.⁴⁵ In this context, the Constantinopolitan historiographical production of the mid-tenth century is approached as being ideologically divided in two major opposing parties: the representatives of the ideal of *absolute* or *traditional* ecumenicity (anti-Macedonian party) that produced 'ecumenical historiography' in the form of the world chronicles of the so-called Logothetes' circle, and the ideologues of *limited* ecumenicity (pro-Macedonian party). The latter tended to marginalize the ecumenical aspect of historiography by focusing on the production of 'dynastic history'.⁴⁶

This analytical schema has been addressed with scepticism at various levels. One counterargument is that the sources of the period, historiographical or other, do not report on a struggle over the content of Roman ecumenical ideology between two opposing political parties.⁴⁷ This argument is corroborated by the fact that the tenth-century Byzantine power elite accepted a formal division of ecumenical supremacy only between two rulers, the Roman sovereign in Constantinople and the Muslim sovereign in Baghdad, as a letter of Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos to the caliph al-Muqtadir in 913/14 makes evident.⁴⁸ No similar statement is found in Byzantine sources for a ruler in the Latin West. Nevertheless, if we were to accept that a reading of the sources between the lines could stand in for the absence of such a straightforward statement, one needs to consider a further counterargument. This has maintained that the premise about an ideological distinction between *absolute* and *limited* visions of supremacy over the former Christian-Roman world at the Byzantine court seems to be informed by an overly modern approach to Byzantine political ideology.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Lounghis, 'L'historiographie de l'époque Macédonienne', pp. 69–86; Lounghis, *Κωνσταντίνου Ζ' Πορφυρογέννητου De administrando imperio*, pp. 36–101; Lounghis, 'Die byzantinische Ideologie der "begrenzten Ökumene"', pp. 117–28.

⁴⁶ Lounghis, *Η ιδεολογία της Βυζαντινής ιστοριογραφίας*, passim.

⁴⁷ On this argument, see Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονολόγοι*, pp. 46–47.

⁴⁸ Nicholas I, *Letters*, ed. by Jenkins and Westerink, 1, 16–18, pp. 3–4: 'I mean that there are two lordships, that of the Saracens and that of the Romans, which stand above all lordship on earth, and shine out like the two mighty beacons in the firmament'.

⁴⁹ Koder, 'Die räumlichen Vorstellungen', pp. 29–30.

According to this viewpoint, the ecumenical dimension of medieval East Roman political thinking can hardly be measured against the goals of the current foreign and, in particular, military policies of the post-seventh-century imperial city state of Constantinople. One rather needs to differentiate between pragmatic constraints, which compelled the Constantinopolitan ruling elite to focus on affairs in a *de facto* contracted geopolitical sphere of influence within the former Roman world, and this elite's self-identification as Roman. The latter axiomatically precluded any artificial distinction between *absolute* and *limited* ecumenicity in Byzantine political imagery. In my perspective, this argument emphasizes a central aspect of medieval East Roman political thought: the prerogative of the Roman emperor of Constantinople to claim nominal supremacy over the whole former *orbis romanus* was not bound to a grand-strategic plan of foreign, in particular military, policy.⁵⁰ As has been noted, such a plan probably did not even inform the Justinianic *reconquista*, which is often referenced as an archetype of Byzantine ecumenical policies.⁵¹

In the world view of the tenth-century Byzantine ruling elite, the emperor of Constantinople was the only Roman emperor in the world, and therefore *de jure* the only ruler who could claim the Roman political heritage and the primordial right of sovereignty over the whole Christian, i.e. former Roman, Oecumene. This perception had indeed very little to do with the enactment or, for that matter, abandonment of a politico-military programme that would actively pursue the reinstating of direct imperial authority over the largest part of this Oecumene. Such a task had become incrementally unrealistic in the post-sixth-century geopolitical context due to the empire's radical contraction in terms of territory, revenues, and manpower, especially after the Muslim expansion.

The post-seventh-century confinement of Byzantine military endeavours in the West to those parts of the Italian Peninsula, where the empire maintained some provincial outposts, demonstrates Byzantine awareness of the lack of resources that would make large-scale expansionary plans in the former Western Roman world feasible. No Byzantine emperor envisaged or, for that matter, tried to set in motion a military endeavour in areas beyond this geographical zone. This was a result of realism and pragmatism, as the diachronic landmarks of Byzantine foreign policy, and indicates one thing: one can hardly distinguish between imperial policies on the empire's western frontier during the tenth century that were dictated by visions of *absolute* and *limited* ecumenicity respectively.

⁵⁰ Cf. Stouraitis, "Just War" and "Holy War" in the Middle Ages, pp. 250–56.

⁵¹ See Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, pp. 137–53.

For instance, the military policies of Constantine VII (945–59) and Nikephoros II Phokas (963–69) in Italy, despite their obvious differences, were principally informed by the need to protect the Byzantine possessions in South Italy and to deal with the Muslim danger in Sicily.⁵² At the same time, the obvious change in Byzantine diplomatic attitudes towards the Franks between the reigns of those two emperors was not determined by a different vision of East Roman supremacy within the Christian Oecumene, but rather by a changing geopolitical context. When Constantine VII was applying to the Franks a distinct but, nonetheless, politically subordinate status within the Christian Oecumene in his political writings of the 950s, there existed no ruler holding the title of the Roman emperor in the West. This facilitated the accommodation of the Christian Franks in the ideological schema of Byzantine diplomacy that presented Christian peoples as potential allies of the Byzantines against the common Muslim foe — a schema that had been put forward by Constantine VII's father Leo VI in the politico-military treatise *Taktika* already in the early tenth century.⁵³ As opposed to that, Nikephoros II Phokas was confronted with the provocation of Otto I's crowning as *imperator* in 962. The latter's campaigns against Byzantine possessions in Italy (967–68) that aimed to compel the Byzantine emperor to accept his plans for an imperial intermarriage⁵⁴ sealed the turn towards a hostile relationship. This hostility is colourfully depicted in the account of the second embassy of the bishop of Cremona Liutprand to Constantinople in 968.⁵⁵

It follows that the content of the ecumenical ideal and its role in tenth-century Byzantine political imagery needs to be disconnected from the objectives of imperial policies in the West. It should rather be analysed in different terms. The broadly shared belief among the members of the Byzantine ruling elite that the sole Roman emperor in the world, the emperor in Constantinople, was the only rightful heir of the Roman imperial culture was above all a constitutive element of this elite's identification as Roman. Even though this belief was employed in a normative fashion by Byzantine authors to inform the theoretical justification of any minor expansion of Byzantine territory in the period after the seventh century, its principal sociopolitical function was to cir-

⁵² Shepard, 'Western Approaches (900–1025)', p. 544.

⁵³ On a comparative analysis of the image of the Franks in the *Tactica* of Leo VI and the *De administrando imperio* of Constantine VII, see Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*, pp. 232–43, esp. 240–42.

⁵⁴ Shepard, 'Western Approaches (900–1025)', pp. 546–47.

⁵⁵ Shepard, 'Western Approaches (900–1025)', pp. 545–46.

cumscribe Byzantine exclusiveness in regards to the Roman political heritage. This means, to deprive any other sovereign Christian ruler within the former Roman world of the right to claim a share in this political heritage and to call himself emperor of the Romans. Whereas pragmatic constraints obliged the emperor in Constantinople to pay due respect to the peer political status of certain Western sovereigns in diplomatic terms, the identity discourse of the Constantinopolitan ruling elite strictly deprived those rulers of the right to call themselves Romans.

It is in this politico-ideological context, that we should try to interpret and explain Constantine VII's initiative to promote the image of a mass corpus of history through the innovative combination of dynastic history and world chronicle within a framework of transition of the genre of historiography from *chronographia* to *historia*.⁵⁶ If we accept that the genre of world chronicle bore certain connotations of ideological adherence to the traditional Roman notion of ecumenical empire, one cannot ignore the emperor's consistent efforts to establish a certain image of the *Scriptores* in public opinion. The representation of this work as the last part of the largest and most systematic Roman account of world history currently available can hardly be taken as evidence of his intention to use the genre of history as a means of deviation from the traditional patterns of Roman political ideology. Instead, his undertaking should be positioned in the broader context of the process of *renovatio imperii* under the Macedonian dynasty, which had begun with the process of revision of the Roman law, the Justinianic *Corpus iuris civilis*, under the emperor's father.⁵⁷

In the sociopolitical context of the Roman Empire, law had traditionally been the primary source that provided the society with a deontological framework, intended to perpetuate a certain sociopolitical order and its identity. Constantine VII's decision to instrumentalize historiography in a manner that no other Byzantine emperor had done before points to his intention to contribute to the process of reassertion of Constantinople's Roman political heritage through an alternative source of political normativity, i.e. history. By symbolically recalling a totalizing image of the Roman imperial past into the present, he was inscribing the recent history of the Roman imperial power of Constantinople and, above all, of his own dynasty into a schema of linear continuity of the Roman imperial rule in time. This schema was intended to serve current political and cultural needs in the sociopolitical context of an imperial city state that sought to ideologically reassert its image as a predominant world power.

⁵⁶ On this transition of genre, see Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι*, pp. 49–50.

⁵⁷ Cf. Magdalino, 'Knowledge', p. 208.

In order to better understand the ideological co-determinants that shaped Constantine VII's historiographical agenda, one needs to take a closer look at two other treatises written by him about the same time as the *Scriptores*. The *De thematibus* and the *De administrando imperio* deal with the administrative geography and the governance of the empire respectively, and bear useful historiographical aspects that shed light on the emperor's historical approach to the issue of *translatio imperii*. In the prooimion of the *De thematibus*, Constantine VII attempts a short historiographical flashback concerning the developments that had led to the current division of the empire into the administrative and military units of the *themata*.⁵⁸ There, he adopts a military perspective and divides the history of the Roman Empire roughly and schematically into the time periods before and after the emergence of the *themata*.

According to the emperor's schema, initially there existed regiments and legions in the Roman Empire. This refers to the period 'when the Roman emperors campaigned with the army and imposed the Roman yoke upon those that rebelled against them, and laid siege to nearly the whole Oecumene that was undisciplined and in opposition'. In an exemplary fashion, he names certain Roman rulers: 'Such as Julius Caesar, the wonderful Augustus, the notorious Trajan, the greatest among the emperors Constantine, Theodosius and all those after them that embraced Christianity and piety'.⁵⁹ In the following lines, he observes:

when the emperors ceased to campaign in person, they ordained generals and *themata*. And in this fashion the Roman Empire came down to the present day. On the present occasion, since the Roman dominion was contracted in the East and the West and was mutilated from the reign of Heraclius onwards, those that succeeded him, not knowing how and up to what point to make full use of their power, cut their domain of authority and the units of soldiers into small pieces, indeed speaking Greek and abandoning their ancestral Roman language.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ On the *themata*, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, pp. 723–71, with all basic previous bibliography.

⁵⁹ "Ότε οἱ βασιλεῖς μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ ἐπεστράτευσον καὶ τοῖς ἀνταῖρουσι τὸν τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς δουλείας ζυγὸν ἐπετίθεσαν καὶ μικροῦ δεῖν πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐπολιόρκουν ἀτακτοῦσαν καὶ ἀντιλέγουσαν, ὡς ὁ Καῖσαρ Ἰούλιος, ὡς ὁ θαυμαστός Αὐγουστός, ὡς ὁ Τραϊανὸς ἐκεῖνος ὁ περιβόητος, ὡς ὁ μέγας ἐν βασιλεῦσι Κωνσταντῖνος καὶ Θεοδόσιος καὶ οἱ μετ' ἐκείνους τὸν χριστιανισμόν καὶ τὴν θεοσέβειαν ἀσπασάμενοι. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus*, ed. by Pertusi, pp. 59–60.

⁶⁰ "Ότε δὲ τοῦ στρατεῦν οἱ βασιλεῖς ἀπεπαύσαντο, τότε καὶ στρατηγοὺς καὶ θέματα διωρίσαντο. Καὶ εἰς τοῦτο κατέληξεν ἡ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴ μέχρι τῆς σήμερον. Νυνὶ δὲ στενωθείσης κατὰ τε ἀνατολὰς καὶ δυσμὰς τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς βασιλείας καὶ ἀκρωτηριασθείσης ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς Ἡρακλείου τοῦ

The assertion that the Roman emperors' withdrawal as active leaders of the army from the battlefield coincided with the post-seventh-century emergence of the so-called theme system is, of course, inaccurate. Nonetheless, this summary of the Roman imperial power's past bears interesting ideological symbolisms and connotations. Constantine VII draws an exemplary list of emperors, which begins with Julius Caesar, the first Roman emperor to function as an autocrat in Byzantine view. He continues with Augustus, the first Roman autocrat, who established the system of imperial monarchy and pacified the Oecumene under the Roman yoke in the time of the birth of Christ.⁶¹ Then, he moves on to Trajan, the last Roman autocrat to undertake a large-scale expansion of the traditional *orbis romanus* — a pacifying mission in Byzantine imperial mentality.⁶² The next exemplary ruler is Constantine I, whose image as the greatest of all Roman emperors refers undoubtedly to his role in the Christianization of the Roman Oecumene. The last name to be mentioned is that of Theodosius I, the last Roman ruler to preside over the whole late antique empire and the one who made Christianity its official religion.

A closer look at this historical construct reveals two things. First, Constantine VII chose to explicitly include in his list the names of emperors who functioned as sole autocrats over the whole traditional *orbis romanus*. Second, the last two names in the selective rulers' list refer to Christian emperors who presided over the whole empire from Constantinople, the New Rome. As a result, the statement about all those Christian rulers who succeeded Constantine I and Theodosius I implies that the line of continuity of Roman imperial rule, which reached up to Constantine VII himself, referred exclusively to the Roman autocrats of Constantinople. Also striking is the emperor's effort to stress a schema of linear continuity between the pagan and the Christian Roman autocrats, which comprised the transition from a pagan to a Christian Roman rule and the transfer of the centre of Roman power from Rome to Constantinople. Moreover, he sought to downplay the role of cultural discontinuity due to the seventh-century linguistic Hellenization of the East

Λίβυος, οἱ ἀπ' ἐκείνου κρατήσαντες οὐκ ἔχοντες ὅποι καὶ ὅπως καταχρήσονται τῇ αὐτῶν ἐξουσίᾳ, εἰς μικρά τινα μέρη κατέτεμον τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὰ τῶν στρατιωτῶν τάγματα, μάλιστα ἐλληνίζοντες καὶ τὴν πατριὸν καὶ ῥωμαϊκὴν γλῶτταν ἀποβαλόντες. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus*, ed. by Pertusi, p. 60.

⁶¹ The standardized link between the pacifying mission of the pagan Roman Empire in the Oecumene and the birth of Christ in Byzantine perception went back to Eusebius; Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, ed. by Mras, I.4.4–5, p. 15; Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica*, ed. by Heikel, VII.2.22, p. 332; VIII.1.16, p. 354; IX.17.18, p. 442.

⁶² Cf. Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*, pp. 204–07.

Roman imperial power by employing the Justinianic utterance on Latin being the ancestral language of the Roman emperors.⁶³

All this points to Constantine VII's effort to project an image of the Roman imperial past that highlighted the *translatio imperii* from Rome to Constantinople. If this comes as no surprise, it is nonetheless of great interest that the emperor's focus was not on the traditional notion of *translatio imperii* under Constantine I. His main concern was, instead, to highlight the irreversible crossing of the Roman imperium to Constantinople after the fall of Rome and the deposition of the last Roman emperor in the West. This is made evident when we take a closer look at his references to the division of Roman imperial authority between Rome and New Rome after the foundation of Constantinople by Constantine I.

The first relevant reference is found in chapter 9 of the *De thematibus*. There, Constantine VII reports on the division of the empire into three shares under Constantine I's sons and successors, one of whom was reigning in Rome, and characterizes it as the old and first division of the imperial rule:

The share of authority of the emperor that ruled in Constantinople reached up to here (i.e. Dyrrhachium). What was on the opposite side of the Ionian Gulf was subordinate to the emperor in Rome. This is how the great emperor Constantine made the distribution [of imperial authority] among his three sons, Constantine, Constans, and Constantius. The first son was given those parts above France and beyond the Alps up to [the shores of] the western Ocean and the city of Kantavri. Constantine, the last son, was given Rome and the regions below France, the island of Sardinia and Sicily, and those parts on the opposite side, Libya and Carthago, the metropolis of the Africans, and up to Cyrene. Constantius was given the parts of Dyrrhachium, Illyricum and Hellas, and the islands beyond that, the Cyclades and the so-called Sporades up to the Hellespont, the so-called Asia Minor, both Syria and Palestine, and Cilicia and Egypt. Libya was under the authority of the emperor in Rome. And this is what the old and first distribution of the Roman imperial power looked like.⁶⁴

⁶³ Justinianus, *Novellae*, ed. by Kroll and Schöll, Nov. 7, p. 52 and Nov. 66, p. 342; cf. Koder, 'Sprache als Identitätsmerkmal', pp. 12–13.

⁶⁴ "Εως ὧδε ὁ μερισμὸς τῆς βασιλείας ἐγένετο τοῦ κρατοῦντος βασιλέως τὸ Βυζάντιον, τὰ δὲ ἀντίπερα, ἅπερ Ἰώνιος κόλπος, τῷ βασιλεύοντι τῆς Ῥώμης ὑπήκοα. Οὕτω γὰρ ἐμέρισεν ὁ μέγας βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντίνος τοῖς τρισὶν υἱέσιν αὐτοῦ, Κωνσταντίνῳ καὶ Κώνσταντι καὶ Κωνσταντίῳ· τῷ μὲν πρώτῳ υἱῷ τὰς ἀνω Γαλλίας καὶ τὰ ἐπέκεινα Ἀλπεων ἕως τοῦ ἑσπερίου Ὠκεανοῦ καὶ ἐς αὐτὴν πόλιν τὴν Κάνταυριν· τῷ δὲ Κώνσταντι τῷ ὑστάτῳ υἱῷ τὴν Ῥώμην καὶ τὰς κάτω Γαλλίας, τὴν τε νῆσον Σαρδῶ καὶ αὐτὴν Σικελίαν καὶ τὴν ἀντίπερα Λιβύην Καρχηδὸνα τε [καὶ] τὴν τῶν Ἀφρων μητρόπολιν καὶ ἕως Κυρήνης αὐτῆς· τῷ δὲ Κωνσταντίῳ τὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ Δυρραχίου καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ Ἰλλυρικόν

This statement demonstrates that the author had no intention of concealing the recurrent phenomenon of occasional division of imperial authority among three or two rulers within the older *orbis romanus* from the end of Constantine I's reign up to the fifth century. The final such distribution of power had occurred under Theodosius I — the last sole ruler over the whole Roman Oecumene mentioned in Constantine VII's exemplary list of Roman autocrats. He had divided the imperial power into two shares for his sons and successors, one in Rome and the other in Constantinople — a division that had endured up to the fall of Rome and the loss of the empire's Western parts by the late fifth century. In this context, the author of the *De thematibus* makes a reference to the current administrative status of the island of Sicily in the following chapter (10):

Sicily is a large and conspicuous island. Previously it was not under the authority of the emperor of Constantinople when Rome was governed by an emperor. But now a detriment has taken place because of Rome laying aside imperial power and becoming autonomous, and it is governed by anyone who becomes a pope. So, in the current time it (i.e. Sicily) is under the authority of Constantinople that masters the seas up to the straits of Gibraltar.⁶⁵

The statement that the emperor of Constantinople did not have any authority over Sicily for as long as Rome was governed by an emperor obviously refers to the period after the reign of Constantine I when Constantinople was already standing as New Rome and the imperial authority was shared by — at least — two rulers, one in Rome and one in Constantinople. This provides the framework for the interpretation of the statements that follow in the passage. The central message is that the Western parts of the empire were not under the authority of the emperor in Constantinople for as long as there existed an emperor in Rome — that is, until the late fifth century. Since Rome had ceased

τὴν Ἑλλάδα τε καὶ τὰς ἐπέκεινα νήσους τὰς τε Κυκλάδας καὶ τὰς καλουμένας Σποράδας καὶ ἕως Ἑλλησπόντου, τὴν τε καλουμένην μικρὰν Ἀσίαν, ἀμφοτέρας τε καὶ Συρίας καὶ Παλαιστίνην καὶ τὴν Κιλικίαν καὶ αὐτὴν Αἴγυπτον. Ἡ γὰρ Λιβύη τῷ τῆς Ῥώμης ὑπέκειτο βασιλεύοντι. Καὶ οὕτως μὲν ὁ παλαιός τε καὶ [ὁ] πρῶτος μερισμός τῆς βασιλείας Ῥωμαίων. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus*, ed. by Pertusi, p. 94.

⁶⁵ Νῆσός ἐστι μέγιστη καὶ ἐπιφανεστάτη ἡ Σικελία. Οὐκ ἦν δὲ τὸ πρότερον ὑπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ βασιλείως Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ὅτε ἡ Ῥώμη ἐβασιλεύετο· νυνὶ δὲ ἐγένετο ἡ καινοτομία αὕτη διὰ τὸ τὴν Ῥώμην ἀποθέσθαι τὸ βασιλεῖον κράτος καὶ ἰδιοκρατορίαν ἔχειν, καὶ δεσπόζεται κυρίως παρὰ τινος κατὰ καιρὸν Πάπα. Κρατεῖται δὲ νῦν ὑπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴν Κωνσταντινουπόλεως διὰ τὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Κωνσταντινουπόλεως θαλασσοκρατεῖν μέχρι τῶν Ἑρακλείων στηλῶν, καὶ πάσης ὁμοῦ τῆς ὧδε θαλάσσης. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus*, ed. by Pertusi, p. 94.

to be governed by an emperor, there had remained only one Roman ruler in the Oecumene, the emperor of Constantinople. This emperor ruled in the present over those territories in Italy, which had previously been under the authority of his Western counterpart (like Sicily and the seas up to Gibraltar) and which in the meantime had not laid aside (*apothesthai*) Roman imperial authority (like papal Rome had done).

A similar argument is made in the *De administrando imperio*, the political treatise that Constantine VII presented to his fourteen-year-old son Romanos in order to teach him how to run the empire. There, in chapter 27 on the principalities and the governorships of the province of Lombardy, the emperor states:

In the old times the whole domain of Italy, both of Naples and Capua and Beneventum, Salerno and Amalfi and Gaeta and all of Lombardy, was under the sway of the Romans, that is, when Rome was governed by an emperor. But after the empire crossed to Constantinople, all these territories were divided into two commands, for which reason the emperor in Constantinople dispatched two patricians. One of them governed Sicily, Calabria, Naples and Amalfi, and the other had his seat at Beneventum and governed Papia, Capua and the rest. And they delivered to the emperor each year what was due to the treasury. All aforementioned territories were inhabited by the Romans.⁶⁶

This is a problematic passage; especially with regard to the statement that after the crossing of imperial rule to Constantinople the Italian Peninsula came under the authority of the emperor there. In the edition of the text, Jenkins translated the phrase βασιλευομένης τῆς Ῥώμης. Μετὰ δὲ τὸ ἀνελθεῖν τὸ βασιλεῖον ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει as follows: ‘when Rome was the imperial capital. But after the seat of empire was removed to Constantinople’. This interpretation implies a binary schema of *translatio imperii* from one reigning city (Rome) to the other (Constantinople), which is normatively related to Constantine I’s reign. However, if Constantine VII intended to adopt such a binary schema that would distinguish between Rome and Constantinople as the sole reigning city, i.e. the sole capital, of the whole empire, respectively, he would have

⁶⁶ Ἰστέον, ὅτι ἐν τοῖς παλαιοῖς χρόνοις κατεκρατεῖτο ἡ πᾶσα ἐξουσία Ἰταλίας, ἡ τε Νεάπολις καὶ Κάπυα καὶ ἡ Βενεβενδός, τὸ τε Σαλερινὸν καὶ ἡ Ἀμάλφη καὶ Γαῖτῃ καὶ πᾶσα ἡ Λαγουβαρδία παρὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων, δηλονότι βασιλευομένης τῆς Ῥώμης. Μετὰ δὲ τὸ ἀνελθεῖν τὸ βασιλεῖον ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει διεμερίσθησαν ταῦτα πάντα εἰς ἀρχὰς δύο, ἐξ οὗ καὶ παρὰ τοῦ βασιλεύοντος ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει ἀπεστέλλοντο πατρικιοὶ δύο· καὶ ὁ μὲν εἰς πατρικίος ἐκράτει τὴν Σικελίαν καὶ τὴν Καλαβρίαν καὶ τὴν Νεάπολιν καὶ Ἀμάλφην, ὁ δὲ ἕτερος πατρικίος ἐκαθίζετο εἰς Βενεβενδόν, καὶ ἐκράτει τὴν Πάπτιαν καὶ τὴν Κάπυαν καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ πάντα. Καὶ ἐτέλουν κατ’ ἔτος τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰ νενομισμένα τῷ δημοσίῳ. Αὗται δὲ πᾶσαι αἱ προρρηθεῖσαι χώραι κατωκοῦντο παρὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. by Moravcsik, xxvii.1–12, p. 113.

employed the participle of the verb *basileuō* (to reign) in active voice (*basileuousês tês Romês*). This way, the meaning of the phrase would have precluded the simultaneous existence of another reigning city in the empire. As opposed to that, the purposeful employment of the participle in passive voice (*basileuomenês tês Romês*) indicates that his statement referred to a period when Rome was not the only city in the empire governed by an emperor.

This becomes clear if we consider that Constantine VII or his ghost-writer had in mind the recurrent division of imperial rule between Rome and Constantinople after the reign of Constantine I — as the aforementioned report in the *De thematibus* demonstrates. This means that the phrase, ‘But after the empire crossed to Constantinople’, can hardly have been intended here to refer to the *translatio imperii* under Constantine I in the early fourth century. Given that it comes directly after the phrase, ‘when Rome was governed by an emperor’, it should rather be taken to refer to the final crossing of imperial monocracy to Constantinople from the late fifth century onwards, when Rome ultimately ceased to be governed by its own emperor and there remained only one Roman emperor in the Oecumene — that of Constantinople. This interpretation of the passage fully corresponds with the aforementioned statement on the status of Sicily in the *De thematibus*, where it is reported that the island was not under the authority of the emperor of Constantinople for as long as Rome was governed by an emperor.

Moreover, it is further verified by the author’s effort in the rest of chapter 27 of the *De administrando imperio* to present the emperors of Constantinople as having continuously kept the Italian Peninsula under their authority from the time when the empire crossed to Constantinople, i.e. after the deposition of the last emperor of Rome in the late fifth century, until the mid-eighth century. For this reason, he provides a short, manipulated summary of historical events, in which Ostrogothic rule and the Justinianic reconquest are omitted, and the Lombard invasion of Italy (568) is misdated in the mid-eighth century — the time when the papacy had slipped away from Constantinople’s imperial authority.⁶⁷ This inaccurate account seems to have been intended to put the detrimental events of the Lombard invasion and the loss of Constantinople’s authority over the city of Rome together in the same period when imperial rule was in the hands of the iconoclast emperors of the so-called Isaurian dynasty — those emperors whom the authoritative chronicle of Theophanes depicted in the worse light. Considering that the *De administrando imperio* was not a work addressed to the public, but a personal guide about how to run the empire

⁶⁷ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. by Moravcsik, 27, p. 116.

addressed to the emperor's fourteen-year-old son, this manipulation seems to have had a rather didactic purpose — it blamed the radical contraction of imperial authority in Italy on heretic rulers who did not enjoy God's favour.

This reading of the emperor's codified and often manipulated historical accounts in both treatises reveals a certain ideological agenda. His aim was to project an image of the Roman imperial past that was principally informed by two political ideals: first, the ideal of imperial autocracy; and second, the ideal of *translatio imperii* from Rome to Constantinople. His main concern, however, was not to highlight the *translatio imperii* under Constantine I, but rather the irreversible crossing of the Roman imperium to Constantinople after the deposition of the last emperor of Rome and the end of the division of imperial power between an Eastern and a Western ruler.⁶⁸

These political ideals constituted the backbone of Constantine VII's Roman ecumenical mentality as summarized in two statements in the *De thematibus* concerning the current political status of Constantinople in the world. According to the emperor, the capital of his empire, the New Rome, was 'the reigning city that prevailed over the whole world' and 'the queen of cities and of the whole world'.⁶⁹ Moreover, in the *De administrando imperio* Constantine VII informed his son Romanos that his imperial power was given to him by God in order to receive presents by the peoples and obeisance by the inhabitants of the earth.⁷⁰ It is this political mentality that provided the subtext for the projected ecumenical image of the Byzantine emperors in the dynastic history of the *Scriptores*. There, in the second book (reign of Michael II), the Roman emperor of Constantinople is referred to as 'the master of the whole earth', whereas in the sixth book Romanos II is presented as the ruler of peoples.⁷¹

Considering that the *De thematibus* was, at least in part, written and redrafted in the same period as the *De administrando imperio* — that is, during

⁶⁸ This Byzantine version of an ultimate fifth-century *translatio imperii* to the East is explicitly referenced by the late twelfth-century history of John Kinnamos; Kinnamos, *Epitome*, ed. by Meinecke, pp. 218–20.

⁶⁹ Δίκαιόν ἐστι προκατάρχειν τῆς Εὐρώπης γῆς τὸ Βυζάντιον, τὴν νῦν οὖσαν Κωνσταντινούπολιν, ἐπεὶ καὶ πόλις ἐστὶ βασιλεύουσα τοῦ τε κόσμου παντὸς ὑπερέχουσα, ὡς τοῦ μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου καὶ βασιλέως τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν κληρονομήσασα [...] Ἀρχὴν οὖν τῆς Εὐρώπης τὴν βασιλίδα τῶν πόλεων καὶ τοῦ κόσμου παντὸς τὴν νέαν Πώμην ἐγὼ τίθημι, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus*, ed. by Pertusi, p. 84, ll. 1–4 and 39–40.

⁷⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. by Moravcsik, prol.39–49, p. 46.

⁷¹ *Theophanes continuatus (libri I–IV)*, ed. by Featherstone and Codoñer, II.24, p. 116; *Theophanes continuatus (liber VI)*, ed. by Bekker, VI.5, p. 473, l. 4.

Constantine VII's sole reign (945–59), probably in the 950s,⁷² the interrelation between the projected image of the Roman imperial past in those two works and the conception of the *Scriptores* project can hardly be doubted. This corpus of history came into being as a result of the emperor's increasing awareness of the fundamental role of historical memory and consciousness in the reproduction of collective identity. This awareness, reflected also in the project of systematic excerption of historical works by the emperor's circle,⁷³ found its final expression in the representation of the *Scriptores* as the final part of a world history. This way, a work of dynastic history could be transformed into a threshold between the origin of the Roman imperial community and its future.

Constantine VII's perception of the Roman past was not determined by the notion of historical continuity of a people in terms of ethnic history. It was informed by the notion of continuity of an ecumenical imperium and the relevant need to reproduce and reassert a normative vision of a centralized imperial-political order, the boundaries of which were determined by the limits of enforceable imperial authority.⁷⁴ The careful choice of the texts of George the *synkellos* and Theophanes the Confessor as parts of his authoritative world history was explicitly intended to highlight the linear continuity of the Roman imperium within the framework of universal history. As already noted above,⁷⁵ these interconnected texts were delivered jointly in the Byzantine manuscript tradition since the second half of the ninth century, whereas usually only the last part of the text of George the *synkellos* was copied in those joint versions. Not coincidentally, this part began with the political processes that had brought Julius Caesar to power,⁷⁶ the first Roman autocrat in Constantine VII's aforementioned exemplary list in the *De thematibus*.

It is in this light that one should revisit the statement made in the prooimion of the *VB*, alluding to the author's wish to create an account of the most noteworthy deeds throughout the whole duration of Roman rule in

⁷² Loungis, 'Sur la date du *De thematibus*', pp. 299–305; Ahrweiler, 'Sur la date du *De thematibus* de Constantine Porphyrogénète', pp. 1–5. On the various stages of the composition of the text see now the latest argument in Haldon, *The 'De Thematibus'* (forthcoming).

⁷³ On the *Excerpta*, see Flusin, 'Logique d'une anti-histoire', pp. 537–59; Németh, 'The Imperial Systematisation of the Past', pp. 232–58.

⁷⁴ Stouraitis, 'Reinventing Roman Ethnicity in High and Late Medieval Byzantium', pp. 72–76.

⁷⁵ Cf. n. 34 above.

⁷⁶ Ševčenko, 'The Search for the Past', p. 283; Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι*, pp. 96–97.

Constantinople.⁷⁷ In Constantine VII's view, the history of Roman imperial rule that was seated in the world-reigning city of Constantinople did not begin with the first Christian emperor of Constantinople, but with the rise to power of Julius Caesar in Rome. In this schema of linear historical continuity from the first pagan Roman autocrats (Julius Caesar and Augustus) to his own times, the emperor was able to unite the pagan and Christian past of the imperial office and to provide his authoritative version of the process of *translatio imperii* from Rome to Constantinople that had been irreversibly sealed after the deposition of the last emperor of Rome in the late fifth century. Thus, he was able to reassert the ecumenical claims of New Rome despite the radical territorial contraction of Roman imperial authority and, last but not least, to downplay the significance of the major cultural change concerning the imperial administration's Hellenization during the seventh century.

In the *De thematibus*, the emperor presented Latin as the ancestral language of the Roman emperors of Constantinople and referred to Greek as the language adopted by them from the time of Heraclius onwards.⁷⁸ In the *Scriptores*, the adopted Greek language was referred to as the language (*glôtta*) or voice (*phonê*) of the Romans.⁷⁹ This stance demonstrates the main difference between an ethnic vision of the past, in which a people's historical continuity and boundaries were informed and circumscribed by the continuity of historic cultural markers, and an imperial vision. In the latter, it was the continuity of the centralized authority of the Roman imperial office that determined the community's historical image and boundaries. As opposed to the tenth-century Latin West, where history writing was informed by an established image of the world as divided into ethnic *regna*, i.e. into peoples of historical culture and notional common descent circumscribed by political loyalty to their king, Constantine VII produced history with the aim to reassert the vision of an imperial order, and to ascribe to his dynasty the preeminent role of its renovator.

⁷⁷ Cf. n. 36 above.

⁷⁸ Cf. n. 60 above.

⁷⁹ *Vita Basilii*, 68, ed. by Ševčenko, p. 234; *Theophanes continuatus (liber VI)*, ed. by Bekker, VI.15, p. 407.

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